



MINOR PUZZLE among the many that surround William Shakespeare's personal life is that not once was his name mentioned by his son-in-law, a prominent physician named John Hall.

Conversely, the dramatist mentioned Dr. Hall's name only once indirectly, as husband of his eldest daughter Susanna and co-beneficiary in his will. Poet and physician spent nine years linked by family ties without once acknowledging each other's existence for history's records.

The Man. John Hall was born in the village of Carlton, in Bedfordshire, one of 11 children, only six of whom were recorded in baptismal certificates.

The Halls were a family of well-to-do landed gentry, possessing a coat of arms, and inclined by family tradition toward religion and medicine. The father, William Hall, was a staunch Protestant churchman, opinionated and austere but noted for his charitable deeds. He owned a collection of medical books, and some reports made him a physician who mixed medical theory with alchemy and astrology.*

John was studious and soberminded, in contrast with an older brother named Dive who was eventually disinherited for his dissolute living. When John was 14 he and Dive were enrolled at Queen's College at Cambridge University 30 miles away. John obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree at 18, added a masters degree four years later. He may have been a fellow student with William Harvey who was at Caius College in the same period.

Hall studied medicine in France, possibly at the University of Montpellier, although there is no record of his attendance. He never completed the work for his medical degree but was licensed as a physician after passing an examination given by clerical authorities.

He formed his own views on medicine, rejecting the alchemy and astrology favored by his father; when William Hall died he bequeathed to John all his books on physic but not his magicomedical works, the will noting that John "will have nothing to do

*He was apparently a disciple of Jerome Cardan, a 16th century Italian mathematician and physician who considered astrology and alchemy to be the keys to the origin of life.

with these things."

At the age of 25 Dr. Hall settled in Stratford-on-Avon, then a town of some 2000 inhabitants, set in the rolling Warwickshire countryside, its origins traced to a ford used in Roman times. Coursing through the town was the Avon, into which emptied two brooks that ran through the town's streets; the town was surrounded by orchards, groves, open fields. A malt house gave employment to some of the townspeople, and the town was also the site of produce markets where farmers sold their butter, cheese, meat, corn. Dr. Hall established a busy and prosperous practice, riding on horseback to treat patients in a radius of forty miles.

In 1607 Hall married William Shakespeare's eldest daughter Susanna who was then 25 while he was 32. The Stratford parish register which recorded the marriage described Dr. Hall as "renowned in the healing art." The next year was born their only child, a daughter named Elizabeth, who was destined to be Shakespeare's last descendant.*

The family made their home at Hall's Croft,† a gracious house in keeping with Dr. Hall's prosperity. The building was half-timbered, with a tiled roof and numerous gables; a wall enclosed a garden and stables. The garden was known for its collection of plants: preserved is a letter dated 1631 in which Sir Thomas Temple directed his servant to obtain cuttings from Dr. Hall's vines. Hall's Croft was situated near New Place, where Shakespeare lived in summer, and to which he retired in 1610.

The marriage was marred once by a case of vicious gossip: a drunken and meddlesome man named John Lane spread stories that Susanna was having illicit relations with a certain haberdasher named Ralph Smith. Lane added gratuitously that Susanna had "the running of the reins" in the physician's household. Dr. Hall sued for slander in the consistory court at Worcester cathedral, won a verdict in which Lane was excommunicated.

*She was twice married but remained childless; when she died in 1670 Shakespeare's direct line came to an end. The poet had two other grandchildren by his daughter Judith but both died childless.

†Now owned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

All evidence indicates that Susanna was a warm-hearted, generous woman, resembling her father in personality, and well regarded in the community; her epitaph described her thus:

Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,

Wise to Salvation was good Mistress Hall,

Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this

Wholy of Him with whom she's now in blisse.

Then, passenger, ha'st ne're a teare,

To weepe with her that wept with all?

That wept, yet set herselfe to chere

Them up with comforts cordiall.

Her Love shall live, her mercy spread,

When thou hast ne're a teare to shed.

At Shakespeare's death in 1616, Dr. Hall and Susanna inherited the bard's home at New Place, became executors of his will and assumed the care of his widow Anne. She lived with them for her last seven years; when she died Dr. Hall collaborated with Susanna in a tribute of affection inscribed in Latin on her tomb:

Milk, life, thou gavest. For a boon so great,

Mother, alas! I give thee but a stone.

O! might some Angel blest remove its weight,

Thy form should issue like thy Saviour's own.

A year after moving into New Place, Dr. Hall was elected as a Burgess on the town council but declined to take office because he was too occupied with his practice; in 1623 he was again elected and again declined; nine years later he finally agreed to sit, but he quarreled with fellow council members and was charged with "breach of orders, sundry misdemeanors and disturbance in our halles."

His difficulties with the council stemmed from his adamant refusal to attend sessions when the sick required his services, for which he had to endure fines. In the letter of one patient who called him away from a council meeting and cost him a fine, it said: "I send my boy to you this morning to carrie my water and acquaint you with what danger and ex-

Opposite, copies of Dr. Hall's Select Observations on English Bodies. Observ. XIX describes how he cured his wife of the Cholick; Observ. XXII describes a purgative given poet Michael Drayton for a tertian fever.



Physician
and Poet

Select Observations ON ENGLISH BODIES:

OR,
Cures both Empericall and
Historicall, performed up-
on very eminent Per-
sons in desperate
Diseases.

First, written in Latine

by Mr. John Hall Physician,
living at Stratford upon Avon
in Warwickshire, where he
was very famous, as also in
the Counties adjacent, as ap-
pears by these Observations
drawn out of severall hun-
dreds of his, as choyleft.

Now put into English for com-
mon benefit by James Cooke
Practitioner in Physick and
Chirurgery.

London, Printed for John Sturley, at the
Golden Pelican, in Little-Britain. 1657.

Title page of Dr. Hall's book. The
work was found by chance in
manuscript during the Civil War
by Dr. James Cooke who trans-
lated it and published it in 1657.

Remayning with the same Susan
Boalob, And to another part the book is
have for her hande and Boalob, And
Richard Lane & William Smith have 16
Pamela 1657

J. Hall

Signature of Mrs. Susan-
na Hall, Shakespeare's
daughter, above, appar-
ently on document with
witnesses' signatures.

Dr. Hall's monogram
signature, left. He seems
invariably to have signed
his name by using the
J to form the H in Hall.

tremitie I am faullen into. I cannot
sleep nor take anie rest. I will fast
until ye come."

He was also penalized for refusing
a knighthood when Charles I sought
to raise money by selling honors; in
this instance Hall was fined £10, a
large sum at that time.

He became a churchwarden in
1628, presented a carved Laudian
pulpit to the church, sold some of his
property to pay from his own pocket
arrears in the vicar's salary. He sup-
ported the vicar stoutly when a faction
attempted to oust him: the quarrel
was precipitated by the vicar's barbed
sermons and unconventional attitudes,
it being charged among other things
that he kept pigs and fowls in the
rectory. The dispute at one point be-
came so angry that a mob threatened
the vicar with swords, pikes, stones.

In other churchly contentions, Dr.
Hall accused fellow wardens of "keep-
ing back the poor's money"; he filed
numerous complaints against parish-
ioners for such offenses as "loitering
forth in sermontime, sleeping in the
belfry, being a common rombler,
drinking in the house after evening
prayer, putting hands in plackets"
(petticoat openings).

The Physician. Dr. Hall kept a pro-
fessional diary, recording his observa-
tions on about 1000 cases, transcribing
the most important ones into two
casebooks; one of these books was
lost but another containing nearly 200
cases was posthumously published un-
der the title of *Select Observations on*

English Bodies.^{*} The work became a
classic of Elizabethan medicine; it
not only presented a lively picture of
his own practice, but preserved in rich
detail the medical atmosphere of the
era.

Dr. Hall's custom was to precede
each case with a pithy comment on
the patient: Lady Beaufoi, godly,
honest; Lady Jenkinson, fair, pious,
chaste; Lady Rainsford [The poet
Drayton's patroness] beautiful and of
"gallant structure of body." The cases
themselves were presented alphabet-
ically, from "appetite naught" to "yel-
low jaundice"; such illnesses as ague,
plague, syphilis and scurvy were
recorded alongside the common prob-
lems of a practice such as complica-
tions of childbirth, menstrual irregu-
larities, disorders of the gastrointestinal
and genitourinary systems.

The casebook contained references
to the work of six other physicians;
he cited Daniel Sennert and Severinus
Eugalenus for diagnostic criteria; also
Johannes Anglicus (John of Gaddes-
den), Horst, Crato von Kraftheim and
Quercitanus (Joseph DuChesne) for
treatments; the references included
both English and Continental sources;
there is one reference to a prescription
belonging to Dr. William Harvey.

Notable were his observations on
scurvy: "general lassitude, filthy yel-
low jaundice, pains in the loins, weak-
ness of legs, frequent changes of urine,
tumors of the gums, swelling of fin-
gers, sweating and wandering pains."
He treated sufferers with a mixture
of plant and vegetable juices derived
from watercress, brooklime and scurvy
grass; the mixture was sometimes ad-
ministered as an aposeme (infusion),
sometimes given as a beer flavored
with sugar, cinnamon, juniper berries.

Dr. Hall's armamentarium also in-
cluded leeches, minerals, laxatives,
herbals. He prescribed more than 100
botanic preparations, mixing 28 plants
in one medicine alone. He also pre-
scribed such preparations as a poultice
made of "swallows' nests, dirt, dung
and all, boiled in oil of chamomel and
lillies, beaten and passed through a
sieve, to which was added white dog's
turd one ounce, the meal of linseed
and fenugreek,† each one ounce, oint-
ment of Diathea and hen's grease each
half an ounce"; the ointment was

^{*}The full title: *Select Observations on English
Bodies, or Cures both Empiricall and Historicall,
Performed upon Very Eminent Persons, in
Desperate Diseases, First Written in Latine by
Mr. John Hall, Physician, Living at Stratford-
upon-Avon in Warwickshire, Where He Was Very
Famous as Also in the Counties Adjacent.* The
volume was edited by medical colleagues, had a
large sale.

†*Trigonella foenumgraecum*.

applied hot.

Some other therapies included
water of frog's spawn for gouty fomen-
tations, also a powder of earthworms
and the white of hen's dung in white
wine. For fainting women, a problem
frequently encountered, Dr. Hall ob-
served that "A fume of horse hoofs
burnt, restored a patient as soon as it
was brought to her nostrils."

For purgation in the case of a
tertian fever, Dr. Hall used an infu-
sion of syrup of violets and noted
that the treatment "wrought very well
both upwards and downwards"; the
patient in this case was the poet
Michael Drayton. In another instance
a gluttonous squire was relieved of
indigestion through a remedy that
produced ten vomitings and three
stools.

For a child afflicted with falling
sickness he employed a variety of
therapies, pieces of root hung around
the sufferer's neck, powdered root
sprinkled in the hair, vinegar and
herb juices administered with a sponge
into the nostrils, a herbal poultice
applied to the heart. Commented the
physician happily: "thus the child
was delivered from all its Fits."

Dr. Hall reported curing a three-
year-old boy of a worm infested tumor
of the navel, in which "five long
worms broke out of a little hole, like
a fistula; the nurse pulled out four
dead but the fifth was somewhat
alive; the forepart moving, the hinder
part stirred. The tumor being hard I
appointed a plaster of honey to be

applied, but no worms appeared; the
next day was applied a Cataplasme of
green Wormwood, beat with the gall
of an oxe, and boyled. There was
given a suppository. After these the
navel was cured and he lived."

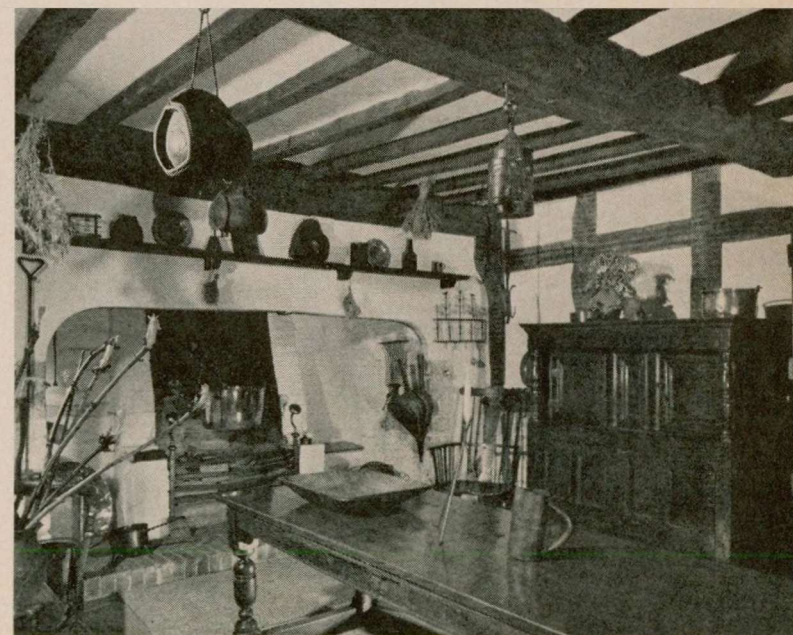
Here are two other cases from Dr.
Hall's notebooks: John Emes of Alce-
ster, age 15, was cured of pissing
in bed thus: the windpipe of a cock
dried and made into a powder and
with Crocus Martis given in a raw
egg every morning.

Richard Wilmore of Norton, age
14, vomited black Worms, about an
inch and a half long, with six feet
and little red heads; when he was
to vomit he was almost dead, but in
a little time after he revived, I gave
him Merc. Vitae. The next day after,
his Father brought some worms
wrapped up in Paper. They crept
like Earwigs, and were very light,
save in color. He earnestly desired
my best advice. I considering the
state of the Disease, the strength of
the Party and that for the most part
he was most cruelly afflicted every
New Moon, unless he devoured abun-
dantly of Meat, in so much that he
was ready to tear himself to pieces,
I gave him the following remedies:
Rx Merc. Vitae grains 3, Conserv Ros
parum. This gave 7 vomits, and
brought away 6 worms, such as I
never beheld nor read of. The fol-
lowing day I gave an Emetic infusion
which gave 5 vomits and brought up
three Worms. The third day, another
prescription. This purged well, but

brought away no Worms. Thus he was
delivered and gave me many thanks.
I met him two years after and asked
him whether he had any Erosion of
the stomach or an Ejection of Worms
and he told me that he had never
been troubled with it since.

Included in the *Select Observations*
were the medical histories of Dr. Hall
and his family. He treated Susanna
for scurvy and his daughter Elizabeth
for "convulsion of the mouth." He
was himself stricken with a virulent
fever at a time when he was worn
down by minor ills and overwork.
His description of his own case:
"About the 57th year of my age I
was much debilitated with an im-
moderate Flux of the Hemorrhoids;
yet daily was I constrained to go to
several places to Patients. By riding,
a hardness being contracted, the Flux
was stayed for 14 days. After I fell
into a most cruel torture of my teeth,
and then into a deadly burning Fever,
which then raged very much, killing
almost all that it did infect."

Dr. Hall purged himself with rhu-
barb, but when his condition steadily
worsened Susanna called in other
physicians. He became so weak that
he could not turn in bed without as-
sistance. Bleeding, purging, poultices
and herbal concoctions were all used.
Finally "a pigeon was cut open alive
and applied to my feet to draw down
the Vapours, for I was often afflicted
with a slight Delerium." He ended
the account of his illness with the
laconic: "And so I became perfectly



Hall's Croft, left, and its spacious kitchen, right. The building, half-timbered with a tile roof and numerous gables, was
at one time the home of Dr. Hall and his family. A wall enclosed stables and a garden known for its plant collection.

well, praised be God."

The records were not begun until 1617, a year after Shakespeare had died; it is not known whether he attended his father-in-law in any illness, nor is there any mention of his death or funeral. Yet relations appear to have been normal enough, if the scant evidence is to be credited: on November 17, 1614, Shakespeare's cousin Thomas Greene reported seeing the dramatist in London and discussing the vexed question of enclosing fields around Stratford. He noted then: "And he (Shakespeare) and Master Hall say they think there will be nothing done at all," from which it is deduced that Dr. Hall travelled up to London with his father-in-law (an arduous journey

was intertwined with that of his father-in-law, with the inscription:

Heere lyeth ye Body of John Hall, Gent. Hee marr. Susanna, ye daughter and coheire of Will. Shakespeare, Gent. Hee deceased Nove, 25 Ad 1635; Aged 60.

Hallius hic situs est, medica celeberrimus arte:

Expectans regni gaudia laeta Dei;

Dignus erat meritis qui Nestora vinceret annis,

In terris omnes sed rapit aequa dies.

Ne tumulo quid desit, adest fidissima conjux,

Et vitae comitem nunc quoque mortis habet.

Hall bequeathed a house in London to Susanna, another house in Acton to his daughter Elizabeth, and divided between them his money and goods; to his son-in-law Thomas Nash he left his books and manuscripts, stipulating that he could burn them or do with them what he pleased. A year later Susanna declared that his goods were worth at least £1000, adding that his books and other valuables had been seized to satisfy a debt.

Susanna lived on at New Place, was briefly involved in a royal drama: in 1643 she sheltered Queen Henrietta Maria as the latter passed through Stratford en route to a farewell visit to King Charles; New Place was chosen for the purpose because of the royalist sympathies of Susanna's son-in-law, Thomas Nash.

Susanna died on July 11, 1649 at 66 and was buried beside her husband; these last lines were then added to his epitaph:

Let anything be wanting in his tomb,

*His most faithful wife is with him,
And the companion of his life he
has also in death.*

The Work. Dr. Hall's contribution to medical literature was written in Latin and might have never come to light but for a chance circumstance: during the Civil War a Dr. James Cooke was surgeon attached to regiments stationed to defend the pass at the Stratford bridge. One of his assistants (mates) was related to Dr. Hall and invited Dr. Cooke to meet the physician's widow and see some medical books.

Among these Dr. Cooke recognized some in Dr. Hall's handwriting; he had them looked over by an eminent colleague in London who replied that the books might be useful but they were written in such bad and abbreviated Latin that they would require a great deal of work.

Dr. Cooke undertook the translation, which occasionally mixed French with the Latin, and produced the first edition in 1657. He noted in his preface that Dr. Hall's practice "was very much, and that amongst the most eminent Persons in the County where he lived, and those adjacent."

In his introduction to the first edition, Dr. John Bird wrote: "This Learned Author lived in our time, and in the County of Warwick, where he practised Physic many years, and in great Fame for his skill, far and near." He noted also that the noble rich and learned persons who consulted Dr. Hall spared no cost, and even those who hated him for his religious views, often made use of his services.

Shakespearean Notes. Although Dr. Hall's personal relationships with the dramatist remain obscure he may have exerted some influence on the plays; some see in him an example of the admirable physicians which Shakespeare generally portrayed in his major works.

Medical historians at one time gave Dr. Hall credit for the fund of medical knowledge displayed in Shakespeare's dramas; the works contain some 440 major medical references, including detailed descriptions of ills and treatments. But later analysis revealed that 215 of the medical references appeared before Shakespeare ever met Hall, another 129 occurred after the probable meeting but before Hall and Susanna were married; only 96 could be reliably dated as having been written after the marriage.

A curious fact is that not a single physician appears in Shakespeare's plays before John Hall's arrival in Stratford; after that the plays presented seven medical characters. Almost invariably the physicians are depicted as purposeful, knowledgeable men of the highest moral caliber; above all they are noted for their faithful adherence to professional ethics. The physician in *Macbeth* discovers the queen's dread secret but is concerned only for the welfare of his patient; a physician in *Cymbeline* refuses to become an accomplice in a royal poison plot; a physician in *King Henry VIII* will not lend his medical authority to another intrigue. The most exemplary of all such characters was Cerimon, the nobleman-physician in *Pericles*, who pursued knowledge and healing for their own sake, was indifferent to wealth or honor that might result.

Summing Up. An eminent physician and a still more eminent poet, strangely separated in history by a wall of silence.



Chancel, Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon. John and Susanna Hall are buried here beside Anne and William Shakespeare and Thomas Nash, husband of their daughter Elizabeth.

then) and that he shared his interest in the interminable squabbles about land tenure.

Dr. Hall maintained his busy practice to the end, even after the illness which nearly cost his life. Three years later he was stricken again, contracting a "malignant infection while fighting its attack on fellow townsmen": the illness was presumably the plague that periodically reached Stratford. On Nov. 25, 1635, aged 60, Dr. Hall died and was buried in the chancel of Stratford parish church, his grave to the right of Shakespeare's. In the Stratford parish register he was described as *medicus peritissimus* (most skilled physician). On his tombstone his coat of arms (three talbot heads)